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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT'S TACTICS OTHER RUSSIA

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (b).

Summary

[11](#). (SBU) The conduct of the June 9 St. Petersburg and the June 11 Moscow Other Russia (OR) demonstrations suggests that the authorities have decided to experiment with a somewhat more tolerant approach to a movement they have attempted to repress with a heavy hand on the assumption that, if left to its own devices, OR will fail to win a significant public following. Both events were licensed by the authorities and saw a less intimidating police presence than at preceding OR marches. About 350 demonstrators attended the June 11 Moscow event; many fewer than predicted by OR's leadership. Mayor Luzhkov and Prime Minister Fradkov told the Ambassador they were pleased by the conduct of the marches. The expected kick-start of the campaign season and resumption of OR marches in September, however, will be the real test of the GOR's newfound restraint. End summary.

Few Attend Moscow Demo

[12](#). (SBU) The June 11 "March of Dissent," like its June 9 St. Petersburg counterpart, took place with minimal police presence, with the permission of the city authorities, and on a central city square. No more than 350 protesters attended the Other Russia (OR)-sponsored event. (Wire service reports of up to two thousand protesters accurately captured Kasparov's hyperbole, but were wrong. The gathering was held at a fenced park, where it was easy to count the small number who attended.) The protesters were addressed by outlawed National Bolshevik Party leader Eduard Limonov, United Civic Front head Garry Kasparov, Vanguard of Red Youth leader Sergey Udaltsov, Popular Democratic Union Presidium member Ivan Starikov, and others. Udaltsov elicited some enthusiasm from the otherwise subdued crowd when he announced that the police had passed their regards to March participants after acknowledging that they had mistakenly detained him on the morning of the meeting.

OR Organizers Elated at
Apparent Government Change
of Course

[13](#). (SBU) At a June 10 meeting, an elated Kasparov and Limonov told us they believed that the conduct of the June 9 OR march in St. Petersburg meant the GOR had turned a corner in its treatment of their movement. Both were pleased that OR demonstrators were permitted to peacefully assemble and march the streets of the northern capital. Particularly encouraging, they said, was the deportment of the police.

The special forces troops had stayed in the background and had shed their intimidating visored helmets, bullet-proof vests, and shinguards. Police presence (at both venues) was reduced and the atmosphere at the Moscow event was quite relaxed. Kasparov and Limonov noted as well the change in the tenor of their conversations with Ministry of Internal Affairs officials. The exchanges had become more constructive, less adversarial, they both said. They portrayed the apparent change of heart to a realization by GOR officials that continued confrontation only generated bad publicity, both in Russia and abroad. Kasparov noted that advertising OR events remained problematic, however. A special edition St. Petersburg newspaper had been confiscated by the authorities before it could be distributed, and Moscow area publishing houses had refused to print OR's meeting materials.

14. (SBU) The June 13 Moscow press largely agreed, in the words of the national daily Moskovskiy Komsomolets, that after "nine scandalous demonstrations," the authorities understood that "it is better to license them, or the consequences will be even greater." The national daily Kommersant quoted Public Chamber member and Executive Director of the Russian Foundation for Free Elections Andrey Przhezdonskiy as saying that "reason has finally triumphed over conflict."

Luzhkov, Fradkov Pleased

15. (SBU) In a brief June 12 conversation, Moscow Mayor Luzhkov told the Ambassador he was satisfied with how the OR demonstration went; especially that conflict and other

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incidents had been avoided. Luzhkov suggested that the city's new tolerance was the result of a conscious GOR decision to change tack. In a separate conversation on the margins of the weekend St. Petersburg Economic Forum, a visibly pleased Prime Minister Fradkov noted that "even the demonstrators were in good form" at the concurrently staged OR event.

Comment

16. (SBU) Events in the fall, when Other Russia hopes to resume its street protests and the pressure of the impending elections will make the authorities nervous, will show how permanent the triumph of reason is. The insignificant turnout in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the apparent lack of a clear-cut OR strategy may help persuade the authorities that it is easier to let the protests run their course than to attempt to muscle them out of existence.

BURNS